

The Journal of Indian Art and Industry.

PERSIAN AND INDIAN BOOKBINDING.

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THE best specimens of bookbinding that are now made in India come from Ulwar, and are doubtless of Persian origin. I have examined a large number of books in the country, and have also seen many others which have generally been looked upon as fine examples in European libraries, but very few approach in goodness of design and carefulness of execution the work of Kari Ahmed and his sons, who were for some years in the employ of the Chief of Ulwar.

It has been very difficult to obtain accurate information regarding Kari Ahmed and his work. The notes on the subject which were published in 1888 in my book on "Ulwar and its Art Treasures" were not complete. According to Dr. Harrington, Agency Surgeon at Ulwar, who has been good enough to make recent enquiries for me, Kari Ahmed came from Delhi about 1820 to Ulwar, at the invitation of Maharaja Banni Singh, the third Chief of that State, in order to bind a celebrated copy of the Gulistan of Shekh Saadi, which had been prepared for the Prince by Agha Mirza of Delhi. The son of Kari Ahmed, or Kari Abdul Rahman, was also an artist, and assisted in painting the borders of the Gulistan. He is said to have learnt this art from a Persian. Kari Ahmed himself was formerly in the service of the Emperor at Delhi, where his family had lived for 150 years, and had, no doubt, been employed by the Court. They came originally, it is stated, from Kashgar in Central Asia. As far as can at present be ascertained, the work of bookbinding was first commenced by them at Delhi: according to one account it was learnt from a Fakir who came from Lahore.

Kari Ahmed had two sons—the above-named Kari Abdul Rahman and Abdul Khalik. The former of these left two sons—Kari Abdul Ghafur, now aged 40 years, and Kari Abdul Salam, aged 32 years—while the latter is represented by one son, Abdul Gaffer, aged 21. These three men now carry on the profession, but in their hands it has been degenerated, as is naturally the case when an art is practised merely because a man's father was skilled in it, and without the individual himself showing any special inclination for it. The inevitable result will be, first, inferior work, and then loss of the art altogether, as none of these men are likely to teach outsiders the different processes.

The following extracts from the book on Ulwar above referred to will perhaps be of interest:—

"In their [that is, the grandsons'] hands the art is likely to become a mere trade and degenerate. Already defects are seen which were never noticed in Abdul Rahman's work. It is in this way that so many beautiful arts are lost in India. A man of real genius develops an art from some hints he receives from strangers, or, it may be, discovers it himself, but from jealousy, or from fear of destroying his monopoly, teaches only the members of his own family, who may or may not share his skill, but too often are without genius, and thus, in the course of a generation or two, nothing remains but a shadow or parody of, perhaps, an exquisite production. The want of confidence each man has in his neighbour is at the bottom of this unsatisfactory state of things."

"In the Ulwar work the ornament is somewhat after the old Grolier style, in which the colours are painted on the boards and are not inlaid. In most of the designs the pattern is produced by the use of brass blocks. The colours are then painted on with the brush. The Ulwar artist sometimes colours the whole of the ground, and at others only part of it, so as to produce very different effects by the use of the same blocks.

"The edges of [the leaves of] his books are frequently painted with designs in colour; for example, the Gulistan has a pretty floral border in coloured outlines. The outsides of this work are done in gold on a blue ground, the back is a painted gold pattern on a black ground, and the insides also have a different gold design on a blue base.

"As this style of binding is only used for works of great importance it is appropriate to their contents, and is properly subordinated in interest and attraction to the true value of the work itself, thus being in harmony with one of the principal canons of design. It is expensive, as it is all hand-made. The cost when much gold is used is given as one rupee per square inch, but the present artists are open to bargaining, and the writer has obtained specimens of the best quality worked on both sides of the board at the low rate of seven annas per square inch. The fact is, the men ask for as much as they can get, and as their work is curious and valuable, and can be produced only in very limited quantities, they have, as a rule, very little difficulty in disposing of it. They bound the volume that contained the names of the subscribers to the National Fund which was established by H.E. the Countess of Dufferin. This book was presented to H.M. the Queen-Empress, and numerous specimens of the work of the father (Abdul Rahman) and sons have also been made for Royal and other distinguished persons. The art, as at present practised, is therefore peculiarly one for the rich and influential."

To these remarks it may be added that the workmen use the brass blocks handed down from their grandfather Kari Ahmed as well as a few which were engraved by Abdul Rahman, who was also a man of talent. He died only a few years ago. The family appears to be of Turkoman descent, and the probability is that they were taught by Persians in the employ of the Moghul Emperors. Somewhat similar work, though less beautiful and well finished, will be found on books which came from the Imperial Library.

In the British Museum there is a volume which, as regards its binding, reminds one very much of the Ulwar style. It is thus described:—"ACTS OF GUIDOBALDO II., DUKE OF URBINO 1559—68. Oriental pattern binding of papiermâche with sunken compartments, the latter gilt and stippled, the raised surface blue, the whole covered with scroll work in colours and gold respectively." In the centre is a shield of arms very like the Ulwar work. I examined all the Oriental bindings in the collection, and found none superior to this, but it was not equal to the Ulwar examples, nor was I able to find anything as good in the Exhibition of bookbinding which was held in London last year by the Burlington Fine Art Club.

Some of the Italian books which were bound in Oriental fashion were said to have been the work of Eastern artists who came to Europe by the overland route in the days when the Venetians monopolized the trade with Asia.

The following seven examples of Persian binding and illumination are from "The Royal and Historical Bookbindings" in the Royal Library, Windsor Castle:—

(65) Dedication page from "The Royal and Historical Bookbindings." The ornament is taken from the Shah Jehan Nama in this work.

(66) The Koran. MS. This beautiful copy was written by Harun Ben Bayazid, A.H. 1022, A.D. 1613—1614. It belonged to the Emperor Aurungzeb, and was purchased by him for 9,000 rupees. It was afterwards in the possession of Tippoo Sultan, and was sent to the Royal Library by the Directors of the East India Company in 1807. $9\frac{5}{8}$ by $5\frac{1}{2}$ in.

(67) Specimens of Persian Drawing and Penmanship. XVII. Cent. Contemporary enamelled binding. 17 by 11 in.

(68) Inside cover of preceding plate.

(69) Shah Jehan Nama. MS. The history of Shah Jehan of Delhi, father of Aurungzeb, written A.H. 1097, A.D. 1685, by Mohammed Amin of Meshed, and ornamented throughout with full-page illuminations of the highest style of painting of the period. It is stated to have cost the Nawab of Lucknow the sum of £1500. It was sent in 1799 to George III. by the British Minister of Lucknow through Lord Teignmouth, formerly Governor-General of India. 23 by $14\frac{5}{8}$ in.

(70) Shah Nama, by Firdusi. XVII. Cent. MS. This splendidly illuminated copy of the poem, according to an inscription in the book, "is now presented by the exalted in dignity, His Majesty Shah Kamran, as a rare gift and token of friendship to the Morning Star of Sovereignty Her Majesty the Queen of Great Britain, in the month of Shuvval, 1255 A.H., Dec., 1839 A.D." This inscription is in the hand of the wife of Kamran Shah, Prince of Herat. In enamelled Persian binding. 18 by $11\frac{1}{4}$ in.

(71) Ganjinah i La'ali Shahwar Khakan i Namdar al Sultan Padishah Fath 'Ali Kajar. The Treasury of Royal Pearls, being a collection of the poems and verses of Fath 'Ali Shah of Persia, written by H.M. Secretary Mohammad Mehdi, A.H. 1216, A.D. 1801. Richly illuminated, with portraits of the Royal author and his predecessor Aga Muhammad, in fine enamelled binding. 17 by $11\frac{1}{4}$ in.

The following examples are exhibited in the Jeypore Museum:—

(72) Two Panels. (a) Panel, $5\frac{5}{8}$ by $3\frac{3}{4}$ in. Red morocco. Border of gold bands; centre massive gold ground with raised flowers of the same; handsome medallions with blue ground and vermillion centres; the whole covered with flowers in gold in relief. (b) Panel, $5\frac{3}{4}$ by $3\frac{3}{4}$ in. Red morocco. Border gold stripes; ground blue; massive gold medallions with embossed flowers.

(73) Large panel, $12\frac{1}{2}$ by $8\frac{1}{2}$ in. This was utilized to form the front cover of my work, the "Memorials of the Jeypore Exhibition," of which there were four separate volumes. Even in cloth the designs are very handsome, but in a few copies prepared in morocco, the effect is not much behind that of the originals. The gilt scrolls on a black ground which cover the centre are very graceful and delicate. There are five central and four corner medallions in chocolate and blue on gold, all deeply countersunk and embossed. The middle medallion, which is larger than the others, has a bright orange centre. The border is golden on the red morocco ground. It may be observed here that the pigments used by the Ulwar men are entirely mineral, and that many of them are prepared solely by them and are very lasting. This design, with a different scheme of colouring, has been used in "The Royal and Historical Bookbindings" in the Royal Library, Windsor Castle. This work contains 152 examples

of English, French, German, Italian, and Persian bindings.* From the Persian bindings seven examples (Nos. 65 to 71) are included in this monograph.

(74) A fine panel. Used for frontispiece of the "Memorials of the Jeypore Exhibition." In the centre are numbers of large quatrefoil figures with blue ground and orange centres, the whole on a rich surface of gold, which is ornamented with delicate arabesques and flowers. The border has a groundwork of red and gold, in the latter picked out somewhat irregularly with dark blue. Some connoisseurs have thought that, as the whole of these figures might have been so treated, the artist was working with designs which he imperfectly understood. It seems more reasonable to believe that he judged it better not to use too much of the bright blue pigments, thus avoiding overloading his work with one colour. This seems to be proved by the variety he constantly gave to a few designs by varying the application of his colours.

(75) Another fine panel. This was used to form the title-page of Volume IV. of the "Memorials of the Jeypore Exhibition," and is extremely effective. There are rich oblong, deeply sunk compartments, with flowers in gold, embossed on a deep lapis lazuli ground, the whole on a basis of gold, with borders of scrolls alternately on black and gold.

The following are illustrated in the work on "Ulwar and its Art Treasures":—

(76) Panel. Cover utilized to form the front board of the binding of "Ulwar and its Art Treasures." Red morocco, with edge of delicate pendants in gold, and another border of gilt flowers on black. In the centre are five handsome medallions of gold embossed flowers with blue ground work.

(77) Three back pieces. (a) $12\frac{1}{2}$ by $1\frac{5}{8}$ in. Gold floral scrolls on black morocco. (b) $12\frac{1}{2}$ by $1\frac{7}{8}$ in. Gold arabesques on red morocco. (c) $12\frac{1}{2}$ by $1\frac{1}{4}$ in. Gold flowers on black morocco.

LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS.

The border used on first page, seven specimens of bookbindings, and sheet of MS. (Nos. 65—71) are from the "Royal and Historical Bookbindings," selected from the Royal Library, Windsor Castle. Six specimens (Nos. 72—77) are from examples in the Jeypore Museum.

* This work, "Royal and Historical Bookbindings," 152 examples selected from the Royal Library, Windsor Castle, is in course of distribution to subscribers.



65.—PERSIAN ORNAMENT FROM THE SHAH JEHAN NAMEH (No. 69).

The ornament of the Dedication is taken from the Shah Jehan Nameh by W. Griggs for the "Royal and Historical Bookbindings" selected from the Royal Library, Windsor Castle.

For
His Majesty's Library
From
The Library of the late
Tippoo Sultan.

— — — — —
"This Koran belonged to
the Emperor Aarungzebe
and was purchased by
that Prince for the sum
of nine thousand Rupees".

See Report of the Captors of
Seringapatam.

College of Fort William
15th August 1805.

Library East India House

4th February 1807

Char. William
libr.



66.—THE KORAN (with Sheet of MS. by Charles Wilkins, Librarian, East India House, 1807).

This beautiful copy was written by Harun Ben Bayazid, A.H. 1022, A.D. 1613—1614. It belonged to the Emperor Aurungzib, and was purchased by him for 9,000 rupees. It was afterwards in the possession of Tippoo Sultan, and was sent to the Royal Library by the Directors of the East India Company in 1807. 9 $\frac{5}{8}$ by 5 $\frac{1}{2}$ in.

(From "The Royal and Historical Bookbindings." The Royal Library, Windsor Castle).



67.—SPECIMENS OF PERSIAN DRAWING AND PENMANSHIP. XVII. Cent.

Contemporary enamelled binding. 17 by 11 in.

(From "The Royal and Historical Bookbindings." The Royal Library, Windsor Castle).



69.—SHAH JEHAN NAMEII. MS. The history of Shah Jehan of Delhi, father of Aurungzib, written A.H. 1097, A.D. 1685, by Mohammed Amin of Meshed, and ornamented throughout with full-page illuminations of the highest style of painting of the period. It is stated to have cost the Nawab of Lucknow the sum of £1500. It was sent in 1799 to George III. by the British Minister of Lucknow through Lord Teignmouth, formerly Governor-General of India. 23 by 14 $\frac{1}{2}$ in.



70.—SHAH NAMEH, BY FIRDUSI. XVII. CENT. MS.
(From "The Royal and Historical Bookbindings." The Royal Library, Windsor Castle).



71.—GANJINAH I LA'ALI SHAHWAR KHAKAN I NAMDAR AL SULTAN PADISHAH FATH 'ALI KAJAR.

The Treasury of Royal Pearls, being a collection of the poems and verses of Fath 'Ali Shah of Persia, written by H.M. Secretary Mohammad Mehdi, A.H. 1216, A.D. 1801. Richly illuminated, with portraits of the Royal author and his predecessor Aga Muhammad, in fine enamelled binding. 17 by 11 1/4 in.

(From "The Royal and Historical Bookbindings" from the Royal Library, Windsor Castle).



72.—TWO BOOK COVERS.
(From examples in the Jeypore Museum.)



73.—BOOK COVER.

(From examples in the Jeypore Museum).



74.—BOOK COVER.

(From examples in the Jeypore Museum).



75.—BOOK COVER.
(From examples in the Jeypore Museum).

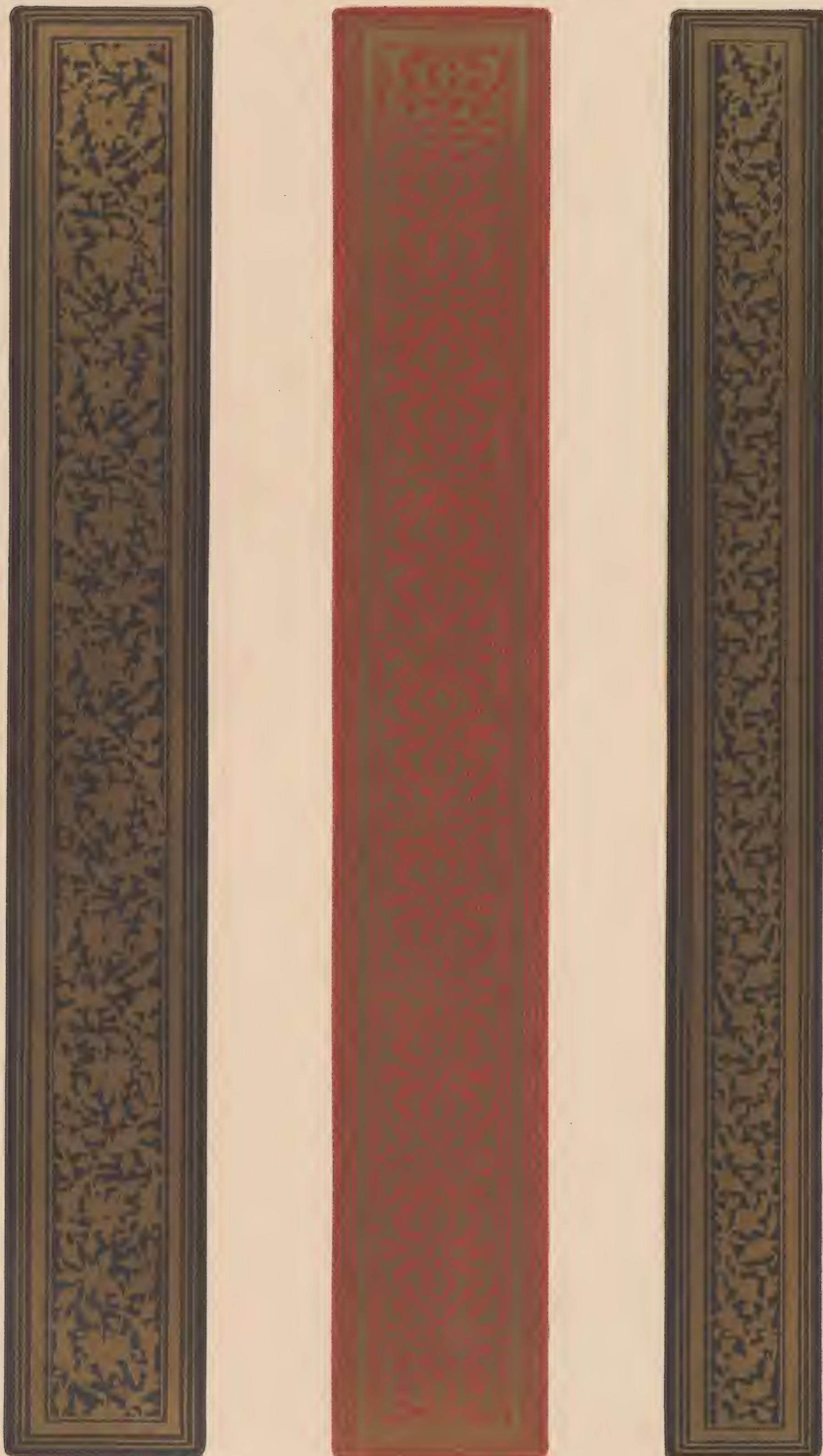
ULWAR AND ITS ART TREASURES

BY

W. H. COOPER

ULWAR, RAJASTHAN, INDIA

— 1886 —



77.—THREE BACKS OF BOOKS.
(From examples in the Jeypore Museum).

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